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ABSTRACT

An Iowa high school's experience with producing a biennial statewide foreign language fair is described. The objectives have been to have students enjoy using their second languages, especially with people to whom they have never spoken before, and to enliven the winter months. Every language teacher and student, as well as others on the staff, can participate. Seeking the ideas of all willing teachers, giving the city or state language coordinator a major role, and early, thorough planning have been most effective. Each school is encouraged to provide some entertainment, and students are charged with such tasks as developing slogans and decorations and writing for donations of items. Counterfeit, color-coded money is distributed for barter in a general store. Tri-lingual signs announce the schedule, and other special activities have included providing refreshments in the faculty lounges, a language auction, speech and music contests, a bike race, a Mexican restaurant in the cafeteria, food demonstrations, lectures, strolling professional musicians, and artists doing portraits. The resulting feeling of camaraderie has been unique among student activities. (MSE)

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Let's Have a Foreign Language Festival. . . A Big One!

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In the late sixties, a huge foreign language festival took place in one of the large high schools in suburban Minneapolis. Over 3,000 high school students of French, Spanish, German, Russian, and Latin attended. We witnessed that event and were stimulated to host a similar festival in Iowa. Since our high school is much smaller, we knew that it would have to be scaled down and revised. We also knew that much planning would have to come first.

The very first statewide Iowa foreign language festival took place in 1972. Over 1,200 students, teachers, and guests took part. Since this date, we have continued to host the event every two years, changing it on each occasion. This brief article is intended to present ideas that have worked for us and help initiate similar events in other states, regions, school districts, or schools.

Why have a Foreign Language Festival (FLF) in the first place? Our response is simple. We want students to have a chance to have fun in another language and to use it with people with whom they have never spoken before. As February, March, and the spring doldrums unfold, teachers need something a little extra to help stimulate students. A FLF is ideal as it can involve every single foreign language teacher and student as well as many others on the teaching staff.

FL 015326

Getting Started

It has been said that "He who fails to plan, plans to fail!" To set up a FLF, we suggest seeking the ideas of all the FL teachers who are willing to help plan and work on that day. If you have a city coordinator, state consultant, or other person who serves in a supervisory capacity, that person should have a major role. Hold the festival on a Saturday late in the school year when the weather is likely to be good. The planning, however, must start early in the fall. Brainstorming is an efficient means to get started. Nothing should be written off the planning list, and those ideas that may seem impossible are the ones you might focus upon first in a group problem-solving session. After five festivals we thought that we had done everything, but this year we added a hot air balloon to our kick-off events.

Planning Specifics

We have four FL teachers (two French and two Spanish) in our high school and 215 students in grades 9-12. Our school is the average size for Iowa. The building houses a total K-12 student population of 650, so it has many classrooms as well as a large fieldhouse.

The initial invitation to attend the FLF is sent to all schools in the state. A list of mailing labels is ordered from the State Department of Public Instruction. Available to us through our university affiliation, bulk mailing rates keep the cost of mailing down. (Mailing labels must be in zip code order for bulk mailings.) Our invitation goes out to about 400 schools.

Our own students and guests, exchange students, and workers attend at no cost. With our total expected attendance of 1,500 people, we average 1,250 paid registrations. This money pays the postage and printing costs and buys items for the auctions and for the General Store.

Each school that participates is encouraged to provide some type of entertainment. This may range from a singing group, puppet show, skit, or play to a music ensemble. Whenever possible we schedule each entertainment group twice in two locations. Each teacher who comes with a group is asked to volunteer for particular areas where help will be needed.

Our students make signs of all kinds and colors, searching various

catalogs for slogans, illustrations, and inspiration. Each participating school has a sign in its school colors hung in the school lobby (the information is requested on the registration form). The signs are laminated and kept for future years. Very little class time is required to prepare for the FLF. We prefer that students come in after school or during free periods to make name tags and signs and to type addresses. We do, however, take three days before the FLF to finalize student assignments for the festival, decorate the hallways, and let students ask questions about the day. A sign-up sheet is passed around to each FL class. It may take every single FL student to staff the day effectively, but, your own students must be given the opportunity to enjoy the activities too. They might be required to work for two hours during the day. We pay our own students 100 units of our phony money for working since their time for earning money is limited.

Freebies and Orders

Perhaps the most fun for the adult planners is writing over 3,000 letters to various companies for donations. We have had outstanding success. At our last FLF we had over $8,000 worth of goods to give away to students and teachers. We glean addresses from magazines in the library, our own language department files, and wherever we can find them. Over $1,000 is spent on orders from Gessler, Lingofun, the Kiosk, SUMO, World Press, National Textbook, and other firms. This provides us with a good stock of nice products to give away.

The Big Day

The event should be publicized in local and state newspapers. Local radio and television stations should be contacted months in advance. Press releases should be sent out telling of the event. (A write-up about the day's activities should also follow shortly afterward.) The names of the principal planners, organizers, and school officials and student leaders should be mentioned.

The day begins at 9:00 A.M. As students come off the buses, they must know where to go and what to do. This has been handled far in advance. Teachers are sent a complete set of instructions once their application is received. This article cannot provide all sample forms, programs, certificates,

addresses, and other pertinent information, but they are available from the authors.

At the registration desk envelopes await each school and have been arranged alphabetically. Students receive language buttons[1] in the color of their language, and small national flags[2] are also placed on the name tags to identify the language they speak. When a student speaks more than one language, we simply add more flags to the name tag.

The day is very dynamic. Although we try to anticipate every possible problem, the success of the day may depend on how well problems are solved on the spot. Suddenly there is no slide show in Room 212; Mrs. Smith has fallen ill; it is too windy for the balloon to ascend from the front lawn of the school. A good rule is to expect the unexpected. We attempt to handle problems with an information center in our school lobby. This table also serves as the International Bank where large color-coded buttons are picked up by persons qualified to distribute our "money." Here guests can find schedules, which are also posted throughout the building.

The FLF is an event that allows students to speak the language they are studying for one entire day. When we are asked what the most important event of the day is, we all agree that it is our conversation center. The entire FLF is hinged upon the center. Here students come to earn "money" by speaking the language with teachers, native speakers, and university students. We discovered early in 1972 that the best means of stimulating students to speak is to pay them.

All conversations are rewarded, regardless of quality or length, provided they are initiated by the student. To make the task easier for native speakers and others who are not teachers, 5 x 7" cards suggest ideas for conversation at each level of language study. At our first FLF, we awarded money throughout the building, creating huge traffic jams. Every artery was plugged tight. No one could move. The following year we solved this problem by developing a conversation center. One of the teachers is in charge of this room for the entire day. It must function well in order for the entire operation to run smoothly. As money is earned here, students are able to go to the General Store (open at 10:00 A.M.). Here the money is spent and then returned to the Information Desk, which also serves as our bank.

The French money is blue, Spanish is yellow, German is green. The International Coupon is white for all other languages and for distributing

when students of all three languages attend sessions. When the students arrive and register for name tags and schedules, they are directed towards the conversation center to begin earning "money." We pay 5, 10 or 15 units of money for each conversation (francs, pesos and marks). Each native speaker, teacher, and helper who is to hand out money wears a large colored badge that is blue, green, yellow, or white. We keep prices high in the General Store, thus encouraging students to earn. They may also earn money by attending a variety of language sessions. If the session is not language specific (e.g., a mini-session in Swedish, origami, "How to Eat with Chopsticks," or "How to Tie a Turban"), we hand out the white money. This has the same value as the money for each of the main languages. The money earned can also be saved for the huge auction which ends the day (3-4:00 P.M.).

Every classroom has tri-lingual signs to announce the scheduled sessions. While we plan a wide variety of events, we find the following work best. They are not in any order of importance, however those with an (*) beside them are extremely popular.

*Conversation Center
Game Center
*Vocabulary Center
Culture Centers
(in each language)
Entertainment Centers
*Speech Contest
Computer Center
Exhibit Center
Mini-Sessions
(in various exotic languages)
Food Demonstrations
*Quiz Bowl
*Tour de Cedar Falls Bike Race
*Soccer Tournament
Folk Dancing Demonstration
Slide Presentations
Film Festival

Additional Activities

Teachers find coffee and doughnuts in the teacher's lounge. Dictionaries, records, books, and supplementary readers and tapes are given away at a drawing at 1:00 P.M., enabling those who have to leave early to do so. Some students travel 5 or 6 hours to arrive at our school, and we know they must leave early to return home.

We offer a special language auction at 1:00 for those who have to leave early. All other students attend the principal auction at 3:00. We generally hold separate auctions for each language. Most recently we tried to combine all languages. Both worked fine, but good auctioneers are important. College teachers are usually willing to do this as it provides good public relations for their schools and lets them get to know secondary teachers. Students bid just as they would at any auction. A microphone is a necessity and the school auditorium or fieldhouse are the best places.

After our first three festivals, we sought to upgrade the event. We added a speech contest and a music contest. Both take a lot of work to organize and to judge and we later dropped the music contest. We present all contestants with printed certificates made expressly for the FLF. We award large trophies for the Tour de Cedar Falls bike race.

We set up a large Mexican restaurant in our cafeteria for the students at cost. We have also invited schools to set up booths to sell food for their language clubs. We invite a local cheese store to sell a large variety of foods. We either invite an imported candy company or else buy items for raising funds for particular classes in our school. Grilled bratwurst is sold in front of the building by either a language club or a class and is always popular. We do everything we can to feed the students, since there are few restaurants within walking distance. This includes purchasing 300 chocolate eclairs and cream puffs and selling them at cost between 9 and 10 A.M.

We like to decorate heavily and provide atmosphere. Regional costumes of YFU, AFS or other students is encouraged. Local citizens from other countries are invited and provide food demonstrations, mini-sessions in exotic languages, or lectures. Professional musicians come and stroll through the halls playing the violin, guitar, or trumpet. Schools sometimes provide these from among their own students. Harmonicas, accordions, and jugglers are included in the entertainment. This past FLF saw an area called *La Place du Tertre* set up in front of the school, complete with large patio umbrellas, artists of all kinds, and musicians. From the budget we paid the artists a nominal fee, to enable students to have their portrait sketched, cut out with scissors, or painted.

Conclusion

A FLF will be a big investment of your time and effort, but the rewards will be great. The many persons working together should bring about a spirit of camaraderie and esprit de corps that cannot be matched by any other activity. We hope that you will be moved to plan and host a similar FLF for your students, community, and state.

Notes

1. Available from Halmast Studios, 1619 E. Lake St., Minneapolis, MN 55407.
2. Available from Gessler Publishing, 900 Broadway, New York, NY 10003.

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